

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims replaces all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (Currently Amended) A method comprising:
receiving a packet at a first device in a stack of packet forwarding devices configured to direct the packet to a destination external to the stack;
identifying an exception associated with the packet, wherein the exception represents the external destination of the packet as being unidentifiable by the packet; and
inserting a vector in the packet to indicate the identified exception; and for
delivering the packet based on the inserted vector to an exception processor being shared by the packet forwarding devices in the stack.

2. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1 ~~further comprising: wherein the vector includes inserting a flag in the packet that indicates the packet is associated with the identified exception.~~

3. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1 further comprising:
using the vector and a table to determine a port for sending the packet from the first device in the stack of packet forwarding devices.

4. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the vector includes a bit identifying the first device in the stack of packet forwarding devices.

5. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1 further comprising:
removing the vector from the packet ~~for delivering~~ upon delivery of the packet to the exception processor shared by the packet forwarding devices in the stack.

6. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the packet is delivered over a transmission line in an aggregate of transmission lines to the exception processor shared by the packet forwarding devices in the stack.

7. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the vector includes bits respectively identifying the packet forwarding devices in the stack.

8. (Currently Amended) A computer program product, tangibly embodied on a computer-readable medium, the computer program product being operable to cause a machine to:

receive a packet at a first device in a stack of packet forwarding devices configured to direct the packet to a destination external to the stack;

identify an exception associated with the packet, wherein the exception represents the external destination of the packet as being unidentifiable by the packet; and

insert a vector in the packet to indicate the unidentified exception; and for delivering deliver the packet based on the inserted vector to an exception processor being shared by the packet forwarding devices in the stack.

9. (Currently Amended) The computer program product of claim 8 ~~being further operable to cause a machine to: insert~~ wherein the vector includes a flag in the packet that indicates the packet is associated with the identified exception.

10. (Previously Presented) The computer program product of claim 8 being further operable to cause a machine to:

use the vector and a table to determine a port for sending the packet from the first device in the stack of packet forwarding devices.

11. (Original) The computer program product of claim 8 wherein the vector includes a bit identifying the first device in the stack of packet forwarding devices.

12. (Currently Amended) A computer program product of claim 8 being further operable to cause a machine to:

remove the vector from the packet ~~for delivering~~ upon delivery of the packet to the exception processor shared by the packet forwarding devices in the stack.

13. (Original) The computer program product of claim 8 wherein the packet is delivered over a transmission line in an aggregate of transmission lines to the exception processor shared by the packet forwarding devices in the stack.

14. (Original) The computer program product of claim 8 wherein the vector includes bits respectively identifying the packet forwarding devices in the stack.

15. (Currently Amended) A packet forwarder comprises:
a process stored on a computer to
receive a packet at a first device in a stack of packet forwarding devices configured to direct the packet to a destination external to the stack;

identify an exception associated with the packet, wherein the exception represents the external destination of the packet as being unidentifiable by the packet; and

insert a vector in the packet to indicate the identified exception; and ~~for delivering~~
deliver the packet based on the inserted vector to an exception processor being shared by the packet forwarding devices in the stack.

16. (Currently Amended) The packet forwarder of claim 15 ~~further comprising: a process stored on a computer to insert~~ wherein the vector includes a flag in the packet that ~~indicates the packet is associated with the identified exception.~~

17. (Previously Presented) The packet forwarder of claim 15 further comprising:
a process stored on a computer to use the vector and a table to determine a port for sending the packet to the first device in the stack of packet forwarding devices.

18. (Currently Amended) A system comprising:
a switch device capable of,
receiving a packet at a first device in a stack of packet forwarding devices configured to direct the packet to a destination external to the stack;
identifying an exception associated with the packet, wherein the exception represents the external destination of the packet as being unidentifiable by the packet; and
inserting a vector in the packet to indicate the identified exception; and for
delivering the packet based on the vector to an exception processor being shared by the packet forwarding devices in the stack.

19. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 18 wherein the ~~switch device is further capable of: inserting~~ the vector includes a flag in the packet that indicates the packet is associated with the identified exception.

20. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 18 wherein the switch device is further capable of:
using the vector and a table to determine a port for sending the packet from the first device in the stack of packet forwarding devices.

21. (Currently Amended) A packet forwarding device comprising:
an input port for receiving a packet;
an output port for delivering the received packet; and
a switch device capable of,
receiving a packet at a first device in a stack of packet forwarding devices configured to direct the packet to a destination external to the stack,
identifying an exception associated with the packet, wherein the exception represents the external destination of the packet as being unidentifiable by the packet, and
inserting a vector in the packet to indicate the identified exception; and for

delivering the packet based on the vector to an exception processor being shared by the packet forwarding devices in the stack.

22. (Currently Amended) The packet forwarding device of claim 21 wherein ~~the switch device is further capable of: inserting~~ the vector includes a flag in the packet that ~~indicates the packet is associated with the identified exception.~~

23. (Previously Presented) The packet forwarding device of claim 21 wherein the switch device is further capable of:

using the vector and a table to determine a port for sending the packet from the first device in the stack of packet forwarding devices.

24. (Currently Amended) A router comprising:
a switch device capable of
receiving a packet at a first device in a stack of packet forwarding devices configured to direct the packet to a destination external to the stack;
identifying an exception associated with the packet, wherein the exception represents the external destination of the packet as being unidentifiable by the packet; and
inserting a vector in the packet to indicate the identified exception; and for
delivering the packet based on the vector to an exception processor being shared by the packet forwarding devices in the stack.

25. (Currently Amended) The router of claim 24 wherein the vector includes ~~switch device is further capable of inserting~~ an exception flag in the packet that ~~indicates the packet is associated with the identified exception.~~

26. (Previously Presented) The network switch of claim 24 wherein the switch device is further capable of using the device vector and an exception routing table to determine a port for sending the packet from the first device in the stack of packet forwarding devices.